Tass: Suicide Symptom of U.S. Life

From News Services

The official Soviet news agency Tass yesterday labeled the mass suicide of hundreds of Americans in the Guyanese jungle settlement of Jonestown a symptom of the "American way of life." Other foreign press commentary reflected that view, linking the tragedy to social alienation and the emergence of religious fanaticism in the United States.

Le Monde of Paris, however, said the mass suicide was "literally un-American" and would only have occurred outside the United States by uprooted persons whose "delirious faith in a messiah" had converted them into "self-destructive robots."

Tass linked Cult leader Jim Jones with prominant American politicians, naming Vice President Walter Mondale and California Gov. Edmund Brown Jr., who are said to have praised Jones' work in the past.

More than 400 followers of Jones committed suicide Saturday after several cult members attacked and killed Rep. Leo Ryan (D-Calif.) and four other persons who were visiting the group's Jonestown settlement.

The Stockholm Dagens Nyheter said that, following the social protests of the 1960s, "drugs, extreme religiousness and . . . sexual experiments" have marked the '70s, and that in the hunt for new happenings death becomes the last absolute trip."

Tokyo's Mainichi Shimbun said blacks and other poor groups were susceptible to Jones "brainwashing" because they were disappointed by the "closed and exclusive . . . American society."

American coverage of the events, Tass said, "avoids the fundamental question of why the Peoples Temple and many similar religious sects exist in the United States."